

MEMORANDUM

To: The Tenmile South Helena Forest Restoration Collaborative Committee, the City of Helena, resources, stakeholders, members of the public, and media.

From: Ben Irely, Gregory Kennett and Maggie Schenk, Ecosystem Research Group

Date: June 16, 2015

Re: Important information regarding the Tenmile South Helena Forest Restoration Collaborative Committee

JULY 1, 2015 FIELD TRIP

The first field trip of the Tenmile South Helena Forest Restoration Collaborative Committee is scheduled for Wednesday, July 1, 2015. We will meet at Marks Miller Post and Pole at 9 am. The address is 15 Lump Gulch Rd., Clancy MT, 59634. From there, we will carpool to the field trip site(s). If you have a vehicle you would be willing to use for carpooling to the field trip site(s), please be prepared to do so. We are hoping to return to Marks Miller Post and Pole by 3 pm. Please bring a sack lunch, water, and appropriate clothing and footwear for the field.

JULY 8, 2015 MEETING

The next regular meeting of the Tenmile South Helena Forest Restoration Collaborative Committee is scheduled for Wednesday, July 8 from 1:30 to 4 pm in the City County Building, Room 426. The agenda has yet to be finalized but will be sent out a week prior to the meeting.

LINK TO VIDEO OF JUNE 11, 2015 "FIRE ON THE LANDSCAPE" PRESENTATIONS

The Helena Independent Record was not able to record the evening public presentations of Mark Finney, Jack Cohen, and Bruce Sims on June 10. They were, however, able to record the public presentations by British Columbia's Fire Management Specialist Dana Hicks and Colorado Springs Fire Marshall Brett Lacey on June 11, the second night of the "Fire on the Landscape" lecture series. Here is the link to that [video](#).

NOTES FROM THE JUNE 10, 2015 SPECIAL MEETING OF THE TENMILE SOUTH HELENA FOREST RESTORATION COLLABORATIVE COMMITTEE WITH MARK FINNEY, JACK COHEN, AND BRUCE SIMS

Attending

Collaborative Members: Jordan Alexander, Joe Cohenour, Leonard Wortman, Jeff Chaffee, Eleanor Morris (to be approved 6/15), Doug Powell, Angie Grove, Ron Alles

Resources: Marshall Thompson (HNF), Allen Byrd (FS), Jenny Sika (FWP), Brad Langsather, Brett Beagley (HNF), David Nunn (HNF), Karl Buermeyer (HNF/L&C), Dave Callery (HNF), Heather DeGeest (HNF), Riley Dopler (FS), Sharon Scott (HNF), Dick Sloan (DEQ)

Public guests: Diane Tipton, Gayle Joslin

Notes – Field trip scheduled for July 1, 2015. Meeting at Marks Post & Pole at 9am. Next regular meeting is July 8, 2015 beginning at 1:30, location TBD

Questions asked:

- **How many years will it take to recover from generations of wildfire suppression?**

Projects are being completed a little at a time. Beginning with much larger chunks of work early on will create larger gains against the overall work that needs to be done. It will depend on project timelines. Metaphor: Like painting your house one board at a time – by the time you're done, it'll be time to start over again.

The reality is that in order to get large chunks of work done, perceptions must change about mitigation treatment. Fire **MUST** be part of treatment. What is a fire adapted community? A community which does not worry about the potential of nearby wildfire.

- **What about Europe's forests? Are they facing the same issues?**

Yes, parts of Europe are facing similar issues. Some areas were well cultivated for generations; people are now moving back to city/urban living and the cultivated forest areas are being abandoned, no longer maintained. That is causing overgrowth similar to what we're experiencing in the U.S. There have been severe wildfires in Europe in recent years.

- **What is the behavior of fire through clear-cut logging areas?**

As was seen in the Plum Creek fires, where clear cuts were checkerboard with untreated units, fire will blow right through the clear cut areas. That's why fire must be part of any treatment plan. Wildfire looks for fuel, not logs.

- **What about downed, jack-strawed trees? How does that affect fire behavior?**

When those areas burn, the fire will burn less intensely with lower heat, but will be trapped closer to the soils and will burn a lot longer. This can sterilize the soil due to the long-burning period.

- **Is there a best time to mitigate and for prescribed burning in terms of regeneration & regrowth?**

Time is not on our side. The damage has been going on for about a decade. The sooner mitigation begins the better. Because the project will progress over time, all units will be mitigated at different points in the regeneration of a unit. This is good because the units will not be homogenous as each unit will be in a different stage of regrowth.

- **Maybe just create a fire buffer zone around a proposed area of the project, then let it burn from the inside?**

There's no benefit to doing that. In extreme conditions, spot fires can start up to a mile away from the front of the fire. We need to change the behavior of the fire from different units within the project area, changing the effects of the fire coming through areas we care about, i.e. municipal water infrastructure.

- **What about north slopes? Particularly in areas that are more marshy, can they be used as a fire break? Do they have to be mitigated?**

In extreme conditions, even north slopes will burn.

- **Why do insurance companies continue to insure homes/buildings with wood roofs and other flammable exterior construction materials?**

Hundreds of thousands of homes in the U.S. burn each year, an average of 100,000 burn to total loss. Of those homes, wildfire is responsible for roughly 1,500-2,000 of those each year. That is a drop in the bucket for insurance companies. Their actuaries see it as a low risk compared to the money generated from insuring those homes. In Boulder County, Colorado, the fire chief attempted to ban wood roofs; he wasn't successful. Soon after his efforts failed, insurance companies began to refuse to insure homes with wood roofs in the area – not for fire risk, which is minimal from year to year – but for hail damage, which happens almost every year, costing the companies millions of dollars.

- **What about post-fire efforts for municipal watersheds?**

The first few rain events after an extreme wildfire will dump ash and sediment into the water infrastructure. Different circumstances lead to different post-fire treatments. In the Denver area, the floods came across a dry climate with decomposed granite material, causing severe erosion. In other areas, seeding helps mitigate the effects of flooding in episodic rain events.

Action Items:

- Homework! Read 2009 collaborative recommendations prior to next meeting.
- Invite other agencies to participate in upcoming collaborative meeting (EPA, FWP, USGS, BLM, DNRC, NRCS)
- Put June 10 & 11 on member calendars for Finney, Cohen, Simms event (6/10), Colorado Springs Fire Marshal & Mitigation Manager presentation (6/11)
- **Forest Service** – find a way to summarize and distribute public comment at a minimum to the collaborative group – but also for the public on the FS project website